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Editorial

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After the reemergence of the crisis and class struggle at the end of the '60's, the present upheavals in Eastern Europe constitute the most important events since the Second World War. For 45 years, the capitalist world has been based on the division of Europe into two clearly demarcated and unchanging economic, political and military blocs, created by the two great victorious imperialist powers, Russia and the USA. Now this division of the world is in question, and -- in appearance -- the whole of the capitalist world is undergoing a complete metamorphosis.

But, what's really happening? We have repeatedly said that we are being subjected to a daily ideological barrage around these events, which is difficult to resist and in which it is not easy to maintain a class perspective. The Western bourgeoisie exults and proclaims the death of Marxism and communism, the triumph of capitalism and democracy. The media proclaim the disappearance of imperialist blocs and the disarmament of the great powers; if you believe them, we are embarking on an era of detente and peace, capitalism having succeeded in realizing its impossible ideal of a peaceful mode of production. The present upheavals are a challenge to revolutionaries too, who like their class are subject to this intense ideological pressure, and who had not foreseen these events -- even if some (like our Fraction) over the past few years provided a framework for the general analysis of the evolution of the international situation.

For many revolutionaries, what is at stake is their very capacity to maintain and develop a Marxist framework of analysis. Sclerotic organizations or those vacillating on their programmatic bases risk falling into a rejection of their principles. In this sense, what is at stake is not only the analysis of the present events and the perspectives they open, but also the capacity to make the revolutionary program and organization live, to carry on a broad and open debate concerning new events while strengthening revolutionary principles. A new clarity can only be born from a confrontation of ideas that brooks no censorship. That is why our Fraction has consciously organized a public debate on the events in the Eastern bloc (see IP #16), a debate to which we return below.

Before that, it is necessary to reaffirm the framework of principles and analyses within which such a debate can take place, and on which a prior clarity is in our view indispensable if we are not to give way before the propaganda of the ruling class.

1) Russia and its satellites were and are capitalist countries, just like every other country on the face of this earth. Capitalism is world-wide, and its basic

categories exist in the East as elsewhere: wage-labor, separation of the workers from the means of production, operation of the law of value, accumulation of capital, etc. The stratification in the countries of the Russian bloc is only an extreme form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself engendered by the decadence of capitalism, which is a given world-wide and is historically irreversible. Far from manifesting the oft proclaimed bankruptcy of communism or Marxism, the upheavals in the Eastern bloc on the contrary manifest the historic bankruptcy of capitalism and its sinking into a more and more profound crisis. In the competition which regulates the relations between factions of capital, it is always the weakest factions that are the first to crack. After the "Third World", the economic debacle has now reached the Eastern bloc (the "Second World") ... before overtaking the principal industrial powers of the Western bloc (the "First World").

2) Although economic relations are in the last instance the foundation of all social organization, the economy does not mechanically determine each particular event. Political and military factors can considerably influence the expression of economic contradictions. The very existence of the Eastern bloc and the destiny of the countries of Eastern Europe since the Second World War have been determined by political and military factors. It was the military occupation, then the political control of these countries, by the USSR(sic.) which imposed their integration into the Russian orbit. Without that politico-military control by the USSR, the Eastern bloc would not have existed because Russia came out of the war economically much weaker than the USA, and the economic gap between these two imperialist powers has continued to grow ever since. The creation and perpetuation of two great imperialist blocs during the whole period of post-war reconstruction, far from being the product of a contingent historical situation, is the expression of the general historic tendency of capitalism in decadence to switch economic confrontations between competing nations onto the military plane and to organize the economy into a war economy under the control of the state. These confrontations between nations historically tend to be organized around the two most powerful imperialist poles, that is to say, since the Second World War, the USA and Russia.

3) The world crisis of capitalism has hit the weakest bloc the hardest, which drives it into a more and more defensive position vis a vis the stronger bloc. The USSR has progressively lost its zones of influence outside of Europe (China, Middle East, Africa) and finds itself under the

threat of losing its status as a dominant imperialist power. To ward off this danger, the Russian bourgeoisie was forced to undertake an important change in policy in the mid '80's. This was the meaning of Gorbachev's coming to power and of his policy of Perestroika. The general goal of this policy is to give Russia the means to ultimately raise itself to the level of its American rival in the course of war preparations for a Third World War. This general goal determines a series of objectives on all levels. On the economic plane, the aim is to make the too rigid mechanisms and the increasingly paralyzing control of the state over the economic apparatus more flexible; this would facilitate the massive import of Western capital so as to increase the productivity of labor and improve technology, thereby raising the rate of exploitation of the proletariat. On the political and ideological plane, the aim is to make the functioning of the state apparatus more flexible and to reinvigorate the ideological control over the population, the proletariat in particular. On the military plane, the aim is to reduce expenses and to concentrate the military presence at critical points, so as to relieve the burden that they represent for the economy. It was necessary for the USSR to apply this policy of Perestroika not merely on its own territory, but also throughout its bloc, under pain of incoherence and certain defeat.

4) The indirect, historic, cause of these changes is the class struggle, because this latter has been the determinant factor preventing the two existing imperialist blocs from unleashing a course towards war after the outbreak of the economic crisis. The class struggle remains the key to the historic situation, even if the workers have not until now been able to clearly advance their own class perspective. An historic defeat of the proletariat would in the end mean its mobilization for war.

We believe that this framework, which we have developed over several years, is the only one that makes it possible to explain the general evolution of the situation in the Eastern bloc. However, the existence of a framework, even a correct one, does not guarantee the exactitude of ones analyses of events. Real events always pose new questions, always go beyond pre-existing understanding. In the case of events as significant as those with which we are confronted today, old certitudes are shaken to their very foundations and require as far-reaching and open examination as possible, one which necessarily passes through debates, contradictions and confrontations of opinion -- except of course in hierarchical organizations whose thought is that of a single individual. A debate is not a luxury that an organization can permit itself, but a vital necessity for the development of Marxism. It is in this spirit that our readers became aware of the debate that has animated our Fraction, and animates it still

(IP #16). Given the importance of the events with which we are confronted as well as the speed with which they are evolving, it is obvious that this debate has also evolved in the course of the past few months.

The question at the heart of the divergences within our Fraction concerns the evolution of the balance of forces between the two imperialist blocs, and this question in its turn determines a multitude of more particular points. Globally two perspectives have emerged. First, the position that was the majority one in the Fraction (IP #16) did not see in the present events a change in the balance of forces between the two imperialist blocs, but rather a simple attempt by the Russian bloc to restructure itself so as to ultimately have the means to launch a counter-offensive against the American bloc. In this view, the change in the balance of forces between the blocs took place before the present events, while these latter manifest an attempt to reverse this tendency. Second, the position that was the minority one saw in the present strategy of the USSR an essentially defensive posture, adopted under the pressure of events, and involving a major change in the imperialist balance of forces in favor of the West.

Since then, important events have occurred which have shifted the balance within our Fraction in favor of this second position, which, from a minority one, has today become the majority one. (This does not mean that these two positions are homogeneous blocs; within each there exist differences of appreciation on particular points.) The concretization of the perspective for German reunification constitutes in the view of the present majority a key element which speaks in favor of an important shift in the balance of forces between the imperialist blocs. Germany occupies a central place in the confrontation between the two blocs. It is the most powerful nation in Europe, the old imperialist pole defeated in the war by the winners who then divided it up; it is on its soil that was erected the very symbol of the division between the blocs, the Berlin wall. West and East Germany represented in their respective blocs the most modern and productive economies. Now, recent events have confirmed that German reunification was proceeding under the aegis of the Western bloc. On the economic plane, East Germany is dead. While it has the best performing industries in the Eastern bloc, the worsening of the crisis, the recent political upheavals and the exodus of a part of its labor force to West Germany have completely disorganized its productive apparatus. It is clear that the GDR today awaits its pure and simple economic integration into the Federal Republic. On the political plane, the recent elections in the GDR were essentially organized by the West German parties (Christian Democrats and Social Democrats). The big winners in the election were the Christian Democrats behind Chancellor Kohl,



whose battle cry was precisely the pure and simple integration of the GDR into the Federal Republic. These electoral results are not the expression of a "popular will" (even if they expressed a real state of mind in the populace), but the expression of a change in the East German bourgeoisie, whose interests are now more situated in attachment to West Germany than in maintenance in the Russian bloc. On the military plane, the army and security services of the GDR were completely shattered by the recent political events.

These elements alone would be sufficient to affirm -- barring an unexpected change in the situation -- that the Russian bloc has lost the GDR, whatever the terms of the formal military accords that must be concluded by the great powers on this point. Even if the USSR obtained the formal military neutrality of the Federal Republic, a Germany reunified economically and politically within the West would escape any real control by Russia. This loss alone constitutes a major change in the balance of forces between the two blocs, and clearly proves that the USSR, far from having succeeded in reversing the anterior tendency, finds itself more than ever driven into a defensive position.

But the threat to Russia does not stop at the frontiers of Germany. Following the political changes that it encouraged in the other Eastern bloc countries, the old Stalinist parties have been flattened and the anti-Stalinist bourgeoisie, more or less pro-Western, triumphed in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The debacle of the "renovated" Communist (sic.) parties was avoided in only two countries: Bulgaria and Romania. In all of the countries of Eastern Europe, the objective of the USSR was to repair the "democratic" facade, as it is attempting to do in Bulgaria and in Russia itself, to reform the discredited Stalinist parties by giving them a new social democratic look, while retaining control of the government. This process was fraught with risk, because the essential historic reason for these countries belonging to the Russian bloc was military occupation and direct political control by the Stalinist parties following the orders of Moscow. Once this politico-military control was relaxed, the

non-Stalinist forces, even openly pro-Western ones, could not fail to surface and even take the lead, which is what the elections in several countries quickly showed. The attempts to renovate the Eastern bloc thus ended in a greater or lesser loss of control over the political situation in these countries for the USSR. Moreover, it is significant that the loss of control was greater where the national bourgeoisie was economically and historically the strongest: in the GDR more than in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, in these last two countries more than in Poland; while Russian control remained greatest in the weakest countries, Bulgaria and Romania. Even integrated for decades in an imperialist bloc, the national bourgeoisie never ceased to represent first of all the interests of the national economy. The greater was its economic and historical strength, the greater was its capacity to make its own interests prevail when the opportunity presented itself. Centrifugal tendencies have arisen even within the USSR itself: the confrontations in Baku, the moves towards independence in the Baltic republics, are only the tip of the iceberg of the nationalist tensions that have smoldered for decades in an empire that has never succeeded in bringing about a real national unity.

As important as it is to recognize the extremely difficult situation in which the USSR now finds itself, so too is it dangerous to already proclaim the break up or pure and simple disappearance of the Eastern bloc or of the USSR itself -- as does much of the bourgeois media as well as certain revolutionaries. A bourgeoisie with its back against the wall is capable of defending itself with the utmost energy. Russia's loss of control over its bloc, moreover, is far from being complete. Gorbachev's capacity to impose order in Baku, or to make the independence leaders in the Baltic states see reason without the use of arms shows that the central power has not been overwhelmed by internal nationalist conflicts. Despite the weakening of Moscow's control over countries like Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, the political upheavals in these countries do not automatically mean their passage to the West, contrary to what has happened in Germany. Germany constitutes a particular case in that it is a nation historically divided, whose reunification corresponds to the will of the local bourgeoisies. The West German bourgeoisie is ready to pay the price, even if that means parity for the Ost-Mark. The situation is different in the other countries, where several factors contribute to keeping them in the Russian bloc or at least in slowing their integration into the West. First, the economic crisis is not only striking the East, but the West too. The Western countries cannot afford to provide the vast credits that would be necessary to economically integrate these countries, and this because of the already catastrophic level of indebtedness on the world level. A new Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Eastern Europe cannot be envisaged because

the world market is already saturated and weighed down by the overproduction of the great powers. Massive credits to the East would be made at a loss or would help potential competitors. Second, more than forty years of Russian control have cemented economic links with the USSR that cannot be severed in a day. The example of Lithuania shows that Russia --although economically backward vis a vis the West -- disposes of the means for real economic pressure. Finally, the military threat represented by Russian troops inside these countries or on their borders is still present, even if in the short term the policy of Perestroika means they will not be used. The lack of desire on the part of the Western countries to directly integrate countries other than the GDR or to support Lithuania's bid for independence is also explained by their wish not to drive the USSR into an untenable situation that would force it into a military reaction with unforeseeable consequences. The West prefers to consolidate the gains offered by the development of the present situation rather than openly provoke the USSR.

Despite the significant reverses that the Russian bloc is now experiencing, and even if the present historical tendency is one of a growing attraction of the East European countries into the Western orbit, the Russian bloc has not ceased to exist. Moreover, this is not a simple question of time. A more fundamental element makes the persistence of the division of the world into two rival imperialist blocs a given for the period to come. As we pointed out above, this division of the world is not the product of a contingent situation, but rather of the economic and military competition into which the contradictions of capitalism plunge all the countries of the world. The polarization of this competition into two imperialist poles results from the transformation of the economy into a war economy, from the subordination of economic objectives to military objectives in decadent capitalism. Even having lost the GDR, even having lost other satellite countries, the Russian bourgeoisie will attempt at all costs to maintain its position as an imperialist power on the world scene. At the present time, the economic power of countries like Germany or Japan can do nothing against the military power of the USA and the USSR. Consequently, while the USSR stays alive, and while other powers do not rise to the rank of major military powers, it is the confrontation between the USA and the USSR that will continue to polarize the capitalist world. In the long run, if Russia fails to reverse the present tendency, a modification of the imperialist poles is possible. But in any case, the perspective offered to humanity by capitalism is not peace and disarmament, but preparation for war and armaments. At the present time, Russia -- seeking its second wind -- is constrained to propose reductions in armaments and to attenuate overt conflicts between the blocs. But behind the scenes, Russia like the US continues to modernize its weapons systems, and has no intention of

giving up its pretensions to world hegemony.

For the proletariat, the present period is exceedingly unfavorable to the development of its consciousness. The world map is changing without the proletariat having intervened on the historical scene. The Berlin wall has been destroyed, but by the hands of the German bourgeoisie and not that of the working class. Democracy and "private" capitalism triumph -- at least in appearance -- while communism and Marxism are proclaimed to be dead and buried. The workers are subject to an infamous propaganda. In the short run, we cannot underestimate the weight of this ideological smokescreen. Today, democracy rears up as the universal rampart of capital against the class struggle.

For the long term, however, the perspectives are not so bright for the capitalist order. The victory of democracy has never provided food for the hungry. In the East, once the ideological smoke has cleared, the hard reality of the economic crisis will again appear, stronger than ever -- but this time under the rubric of democracy. The West has until now been spared the sharp economic breakdowns that have occurred in the East and in the Third World.

But here too, the crisis has been present for years, and the colossal indebtedness can only end up in major economic catastrophes. The workers of the East and of the West will then find themselves together, against a capitalism in crisis under its democratic visage.

In spite of the present upheavals in the world situation, the historic alternative remains war or revolution, and the course of history remains one of class confrontations.

M. LAZARE

Resolutions ON EASTERN EUROPE

So that the reader can follow the evolution of the debate in our group on the events in Eastern Europe, we are printing the Majority Resolution and the Minority Resolution from April 1990, expressing positions held at that time.

MAJORITY

1. Recent events have confirmed a dramatic shift in the balance of power between the two blocs in favor of the West:

— The reunification of Germany is taking place on Western terms and is leading to

a rapid integration of East Germany into West Germany!

- Changes in the other most important countries of the Russian bloc -- Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary -- have undermined Moscow's control over these countries and open the door to the possibility that these countries will leave the Eastern bloc and try for integration in the West.

2. For the moment, however, economic reasons (ie. the ties created during 40 years of Russian occupation and the deep economic crisis in both blocs) as well as military reasons (ie. the presence of Russian troops still inside these countries or on their borders) are keeping these nations in the Russian sphere despite the fact that the cohesion of the Russian bloc has been gravely weakened and its global military strategy seriously damaged.

3. The changes in Russian policy are not merely immediate reactions to events which the USSR does not control; they are part of a global strategy aimed at restoring conditions that could allow Moscow to initiate an imperialist offensive. This strategy has economic goals (ie. increasing productivity, attracting western capital) as well as political ones (ie. to develop the tools to mystify and attack the working class; to try to weaken the Western alliance in Europe). But Moscow is undertaking this global strategy with extremely weak cards in its hand. This forces it to take risks and leads to a certain loss of control over events and which make the long-term success of the Russian strategy unlikely.

4. The very fact that at least one country in Eastern Europe is already changing blocs and that there is a very real risk that others may try the same thing, means that the focal point of inter-imperialist antagonisms has moved to the very center of the capitalist system, the European theatre. In that sense, the present situation expresses, on a deeper level, an intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry and its underlying causes despite appearances to the contrary.

On the other hand, because of the changes in Russia's global strategy and because Moscow and, to a certain extent, the West, must concentrate on economic problems and the need to mystify and attack the working class, the present situation is, on the surface, characterized by a decrease in overt inter-imperialist confrontations, a decrease in the military presence of both blocs in the European theatre and a slowdown in military spending.



5. The internal restructuring of the Russian state is not leading to a parliamentary, western-style democracy but to a centralization of power in the hands of the government and the Presidency at the expense of segments of the Stalinist bureaucracy whose interests are tied to maintaining the status quo.

6. The most important factor deciding whether Gorbachev's policies will succeed or fail is the need to defeat the working class. To mystify, attack and crush the working class may not be the only goal of the new Russian policy but it is the primary one.

7. Democracy is the most important ideological tool today for attacking the workers, East and West. The present context strengthens the short-term mystificatory power of bourgeois democracy and therefore creates difficulties for the development of class consciousness.

But, beyond the short-term, the present changes are eroding the material basis of democratic mystifications. These changes are ultimately improving the conditions for the homogenisation of class consciousness all over the world.

I. P.
April 1990

MINORITY

1. Following on from our previous analyses, we can only conclude that our period remains dominated by the forward march of Western imperialism. The U.S. imperialist offensive went along with a strengthening of the internal cohesion of the Western bloc, both in relation to Japan and Germany. Coming up against this Western offensive, suffering the disastrous effects of the world economic crisis and the results of persistent social agitation which classical stalinist ideology could no longer contain, the USSR was forced to seek a new solution to the endemic ills plaguing their economy and weakening their imperialist power.

2. This change in the global strategy of the USSR is neither fortuitous or accidental. It was planned by the bureaucrats of the Kremlin as soon as the Breznev clique had been eliminated. Even at that time, it was clear that something had to be done to lift the pressure of the U.S. offensive, to revitalize the stagnant Russian economy and free the country from suffocating paralysis.

3. These objectives were served by a strategy of opening outwards, breaking with tradition in the USSR :

a. A diplomatic overture : Gorbachev's many pacifistic speeches, condemning the threat hanging over Europe and the rest of the world, proclaiming the need for disarmament, making the U.S. sit down at the bargaining table, forcing the U.S. to receive Gorbachev, the dove of peace, in Washington. This media campaign seems to have been followed by some concrete steps by the Russians, recognized even by the CIA : an attenuation of local conflicts, disengagement in Afghanistan, diplomatic efforts, Russian discretion when faced with Western muscle-flexing in the Persian Gulf. (At the time, we considered this exercise a warning to the Russians more than to Iran itself.)

At the same time, Gorbachev's strategy turned towards Europe which more than ever has become the theatre of imperialist tensions. Against what potential enemy can NATO now mobilize its forces? The least we can say is that the Bush administration has been surprised by this diplomatic offensive and remains dominated by an uneasy feeling.

b. An effort to restructure the Russian economy through perestroika which implies (and this does not mean to make a judgment on the possibility of Gorbachev's goals being realized) :

- making state capitalism more flexible by introducing management methods that imply a growing profitability in the Soviet economy;

- getting rid of anachronistic sectors of the economy, implying a modernization of the production process, the introduction of new technologies, unemployment, etc.

- renewing the political apparatus (by a "soft" purge) so that the State can be a dynamic spur for the economy while leaving direct management to the managers;

- attracting Western investment.

To accomplish all this, the Gorbachev team proceeded in stages : the reform of the Party, the introduction of new economic criteria to stress profitability in production decisions, the "parliamentarization" of political life, while strengthening the centralizing power of the State through the office of the Presidency.

4. These measures brought their share of hesitations and negative reactions. The Party apparatus has not been fully mobilized behind Gorbachev. He encountered resistance in the Party, but also in the working class which fought against the imposition of austerity. The policy of "democratization" served to distance the retrograde factions of the ruling class little by little, as well as to recredit

the State. The liquidation of the miners' strike illustrated the use of the new methods. At the time, this operation was seen as strengthening the hand of Gorbachev.

5. Russian policy towards the satellite countries must be seen in the context of this global strategy. Hungary was an experiment in this regard that, at first, brought good results. There were overtures to the West to attract capital; contacts had been made over a period of years showing that this was a deliberate policy, enjoying Moscow's blessing. The Party apparatus was able to secrete a reform wing in Hungary in the image of the Gorbachev policy. This was not to be the case in the other Eastern-bloc countries where the apparatus in place represented the old Breznev tradition and had to be purged (an operation that all States are familiar with, East and West). This time the operation was carried out through the pressure of the media (controlled by the central State) galvanizing the masses, as in East Germany and Romania.

6. This situation appears to undermine the theory of the necessity of the stalinist Party to assure economic management in the Eastern bloc countries. Ob-

viously, Moscow is no longer counting on stalinism to guarantee the cohesion of its bloc. In a few years, Gorbachev has succeeded in replacing this with a new "modernist" ideology boosting the merits of individual initiative, liberty and democracy! The criticism of stalinist ideology was first written in Moscow after a fight against the old apparatchiks. This is not something that was imposed by the "events" but something that was at the origin of the events, so to speak.

7. By putting in governments more credible to the people in the Eastern bloc countries and more credible to the West too, Gorbachev avoided the risk of uncontrolled social explosions that would have forced the intervention of repressive forces. In this sense, the Polish experience showed the need to legitimate new forms of social control on the working class. It created the possibility of new popular support for the State, for the defense of national capital, while still emphasizing the need to respect the historical commitments of Poland, as was pointed out when the new clerico-stalinist coalition took power in Poland recently.

8. The function of any government, whatever its ideological coloration, is to defend the interests of national capital. We made this clear in terms of the left factions coming to power in the West with their anti-NATO ideologies. This should also be applied to the East. The existence of long-standing economic links between Russia and its satellites can show us where -- even today -- the overall economic and military interests of the different countries of the Eastern bloc lie. The real reluctance of the West to rush into this "new zone of freedom" can be explained by this. Washington has shown itself fearful that the USSR will siphon off investments made in Eastern Europe. The flow of goods from Russia to Eastern Europe is a reality even if their relationship is, in general, more like imperialist pillage. But it would be astonishing if the USSR abandoned such economic sources and if the Eastern bloc countries from one day to the next decided to redirect their quasi-obsolete production to Western markets alone. It is clear that such a perspective is hardly realizable in the near future.

9. A solid argument to remind everyone of where the true interests of the satellite countries lie is Russian military might which remains based on the Red Army. Its real power must be appreciated. The retreat from Afghanistan, the stagnation of the anti-guerilla forces supported by Moscow, led to an acute

awareness of the need to modernize and renew military strategy, to get rid of certain expenses in favor of other more profitable options. Thus, the cuts in the military budget do not correspond to any real disarmament but to a strengthening of the Russian military potential. Obviously, a new conception of East-West relations has emerged. For Gorbachev, in the nuclear era, the Eastern European iron curtain has lost a large part of its strategic meaning. The military expansion and offensives in all directions typical of the Breznev era have been discredited. Today, the doctrine of "reasonable strength to assure a defense" is the principle at the heart of the Russian strategy.

10. It is obvious that even the withdrawal of the Red Army to its "natural borders" would represent a considerable pressure on the East and would constitute a major propaganda operation obliging the Eastern countries to take care of their own problems of defense. The links between the Red Army and the armies in the satellites are such that it would be financially impossible in the short-term, to foresee their integration into NATO. Russia could, at the most, foresee a demilitarization for some countries but that would involve Germany. A reunification of Germany at the price of a demilitarization of the Reich? Clearly the strategy of Gorbachev has been successful : by opening the Berlin Wall in the media, he has forced the West to enter a debate about the future of Germany. The monetary unification of Germany is a godsend for the Russians (the payment of exports to East Germany in marks), and corresponds to the policies of Gorbachev since he came to power. Moreover, Gorbachev has gained enormous popularity in West Germany -- to such an extent that NATO is forced to take into account anti-nuclear sentiment in Germany. It is certain that the member states of NATO are demanding a re-balancing of forces in the Alliance.

11. The opening of the Wall upset the balance of power in Central Europe. The stakes are high but it is clear that the USSR will not accept Germany as part of NATO. Who can believe that after the decomposition of the East German Army, a Wehrmacht will be able to be reconstituted to replace the divisions of the Red Army? The hypothesis seems unrealistic. Perhaps we should think that the Wehrmacht can be replaced by GIs? In any case, Washington seems upset by the Russian initiatives. For an imperialism at the end of its tether, the USSR seems well able to defend itself.

12. Of course there are many problems. Awakening nationalisms, the Baltic confrontations, etc. all reveal the diffi-

culties and contradictions. But up to now, Moscow has controlled the situation through the Red Army which this time showed itself to be more efficient than the Panamanian adventure of the U.S. military or the experience in the Persian Gulf with all its spectacular fireworks (as when the Navy showed the reliability of its electronic equipment by shooting down a passenger plane) to bring an ally to heel.

13. Thus, Gorbachev, impelled by the development of the international economic crisis, disposing of a more than obsolete productive apparatus and a completely discredited political apparatus, realizing the insufficiencies of the system, chose not to keep going along on the suicidal path of his predecessors.

F.D.
April 1990

DISCUSSION

The Gorbachevian Constitution: THE POLITICAL RECONSOLIDATION OF THE RUSSIAN CAPITALIST CLASS



A Marxist analysis of the political changes in Russia, which have culminated in a new constitution removing the monopoly on political power hitherto vested in the Stalinist party, and establishing a popularly elected President and legislative bodies, must acknowledge that what is at stake is not simply a new set of "democratic" political mystifications, but a project involving real and dramatic changes in the political bases of capitalist class rule in Russia. This is not to say that the new, Gorbachevian, constitution does not contain an important mystificatory dimension, one directed both at the mass of the Russian population and at the West. Nonetheless, any view that reduces these political changes to a mere mystification is guilty of denying or woefully underestimating the depths of the economic crisis which has brought the Russian capitalist socio-economic formation to the brink of collapse. It is precisely the devastating fashion in which the historic contradictions of world capitalism and its open economic crisis have struck the Russian

capitalist entity that necessitated the economic policy of Perestroika introduced by Gorbachev five years ago (see "Theses On Gorbachev", IP, 14). It is the failure of Perestroika, or rather the successful resistance to the Gorbachevian economic reforms waged by the Stalinist party bureaucracy or Nomenklatura, that have impelled Gorbachev to launch a campaign to reorganize the very bases of capitalist political rule in Russia. The new, Gorbachevian, constitution, which establishes a de facto presidential dictatorship resting on an electoral mass mobilization of the populace, is Gorbachev's answer to the recalcitrant Nomenklatura whose defense of entrenched privilege has now become a major barrier to the effort to restructure the Russian economy; a restructuring that must proceed if Russia is to remain a significant capitalist power, an imperialist pole vying for global hegemony -- indeed if the Russian capitalist entity is to avert a total economic breakdown.

To raise the issue of a reorganization

of the bases of capitalist political rule in Russia is to raise the question of Stalinism. Does the end of the Stalinist party's legal monopoly on political power involve anything more than a constitutional charade? And if so, is this the end of Stalinism as the political form of capitalist class rule in Russia? The answer to this last question depends on the precise meaning that one gives to the term "Stalinism". If Stalinism means the form of political rule exercised by capital in Russia from the late 1920's (the definitive triumph of the Stalinist counter-revolution) 'till the death of Josef Stalin in 1953, based on the Gulag, slave labor, mass death as state policy, periodic bloody purges within the ruling class itself, all in the service of rapid industrialization, i.e. capitalization, presided over by a charismatic and despotic political ruler, then it must be acknowledged that that precise form of capitalist class rule (and the tasks to which it was suited) ended with the death of Stalin and the subsequent stabilization of the rule of the Nomenklatura. If Stalinism means the form of capitalist class political rule exercised collectively by the party bureaucracy since 1953, characterized by an end to violent mass mobilizations, the elimination of the Gulag as a primary source of labor to be exploited on vast public works projects, and the cessation of violent purges within the ruling class, in short the collective rule of the Nomenklatura as the personification capital, a rule which over the past twenty years or more has been characterized by economic stagnation and a petty defense of class privilege at the expense of the overall interests of the Russian national capital, then the Gorbachevian project is indeed an assault on Stalinism. However, if by the end of Stalinism, one means that the Russian capitalist entity will now assume the political forms prevailing in the West (e.g. the US, Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Japan, etc.), that the political class rule of capital will approximate the forms typical of the capitalism of the rival bloc, then the answer to the question "do the Gorbachevian political changes mark the end of Stalinism?" must be answered by an unequivocal NO! The material and economic bases for such a political transformation do not exist on Russian soil. The failure of Russia to enter the phase of the real domination of capital (save for some isolated pockets of industry) in the ascendant phase of capital, the legacy of combined and uneven development (to use Trotsky's phrase), which produced the historic necessity of Stalinism as the basis of capitalist class rule in Russia, have left their imprint on the Russian capitalist entity in this final decade of the twentieth century. The relative backwardness of Russian capital, the chronic scarcity of capital that plagues its economy, the still incomplete transition from the formal to the real domination of capital that characterizes Russia (particularly in the agrarian sector and in distribution and consumption), the absence of the well articulated civil society

which could be swallowed by the state (as in the West), and through which the surveillance and discipline of the population can be smoothly effected (the veritable basis of the power of state capitalism in the West) make it impossible for Russian capital to duplicate the political forms of class rule constructed by its rivals in the American bloc. Indeed, it is the aim of Perestroika as an economic program to eventually make such an outcome possible: a task which for economic reasons is doomed to fail (though the analysis of why this is so, and what effect the ultimate failure of Perestroika will have -- economically and politically -- on Russian capital will be the object of a future text). What remains to be done now is to address the question of how Gorbachev is desperately seeking to reorganize the political bases of capitalist class rule in Russia today, and how that project affects the different factions of the Russian capitalist class: Nomenklatura, managerial and technocratic strata, military - security apparat.

Historically, Russian state capitalism has rested on the Nomenklatura or Stalinist party bureaucracy as the personification of capital. Under the reign of Stalin, the Nomenklatura basing itself on the nationalized property forms and its monopoly on power was the collective ruler of the Russian capitalist entity, though the individual members of this capitalist class, the functionaries of capital, were subject to periodic and violent purges at the hands of their "leader". The Nomenklatura was not the only faction of the capitalist class

subjected to the bloody purges carried out by Stalin: The managerial and technocratic stratum and the military - security apparat was also decapitated in the 1930's.

Despite the growing importance of the military - security apparat in laying the basis for the expansion of Russian imperialism in World War Two and its aftermath (filling the void left by the defeat of Germany and Japan), the decisive power remained in the hands of the Nomenklatura. This was made abundantly clear upon the death of Stalin (literally on the eve of another massive purge), when the attempt of NKVD chief, Beria, to seize power was repulsed by the party bureaucracy. The reign of Khrushchev marked the consolidation of the collective rule of the Nomenklatura, shorn of the Caesarist element characteristic of Stalin's rule and assuring the physical security of the individual members of the Nomenklatura through the end of the violent purge as a normal means to guarantee unity within the ruling class. However, in his effort to overtake American capitalism and to challenge the West on a global scale, Khrushchev faced the necessity of reforming the Russian economy. In this effort, Khrushchev turned to the managerial and technocratic stratum, and quickly clashed with the interests of the party bureaucracy. It was this latter, acting together with the military - security apparat enraged by the

"humiliation" of the Cuban missile crisis, that removed Khrushchev from power in 1964.

Thus began the Brezhnev era, which saw the high water mark of Russian imperialist expansion on a global scale and the growing -- though still not dominant -- power of the military - security apparat, together with the still unquestioned hegemony of the Nomenklatura (the end of the embryonic economic reforms and incipient cultural thaw of the Khrushchevite period, with its shift of power to the technocrats and intelligentsia). Brezhnev could still reconcile the interests of the Nomenklatura and the military - security apparat -- at any rate into the late 1970's. However, the incompatibility between the interests of these two factions of the Russian capitalist class became increasingly apparent in the final years of Brezhnev's reign: the economic stagnation of Russian capital, accentuated by the conservatism of the Nomenklatura and its opposition to the economic reforms that could alone make it possible to renovate the economy was now a threat to the very capacity of Russian imperialism to sustain its military - political challenge to American imperialism on a global scale.

It is probable that Brezhnev's successor, KGB chief Andropov, would have launched a real assault on the entrenched power of the Nomenklatura, perhaps through a recourse to a Stalinist type purge of the party bureaucracy. Certainly Andropov was aware both of the extent of Russia's economic stagnation and of the extreme danger this represented to Russia's imperialist ambitions. His death, however, forestalled any confrontation between the Nomenklatura and the military - security apparat, and ushered in the final period of economic morbidity under the rule of Chernenko, the classic representative of a self-satisfied Nomenklatura, impervious to the necessity to adopt a dynamic policy as the only hope to save its class rule.

That task would fall to Andropov's protege, Mikhail Gorbachev. Without repeating the analysis we have already made of the economic bases of Perestroika in our "Theses On Gorbachev", we will limit ourselves to an overview of the political means by which Gorbachev has sought to impose his project on a ruling class much of which opposes him. At the outset Gorbachev could count on the support of the military - security apparat which saw in Perestroika the only way out of a rapidly deteriorating economic situation that threatened to sap the very bases of Russian military power. Indeed, the growing weight of the military - security apparat within the power bloc constituted by the Russian capitalist class was the lynchpin for Gorbachev's bold policy initiatives. Gorbachev originally sought to override the opposition to Perestroika on the part of conservatives in the party bureaucracy through a "democratization" of the Stalinist party. Such a "democratization" would play the role that the purge had played in Stalin's time -- though without the bloodshed

that would have quickly united the Nomenklatura against Gorbachev. However, despite a certain success in removing opponents from the Politburo and the Central Committee, Gorbachev still faced the herculean task of "reforming" the party bureaucracy at the regional and local level where the fate of his program would be decided. Moreover, the speed with which the economic situation deteriorated, the rise of significant discontent in the working class (barely contained at the time of last Spring's coal miners strike), and the threat (which Gorbachev had underestimated) to the very integrity of the Russian capitalist entity posed by nationalism in the non-Russian republics, made it imperative that the process of the economic restructuration of Russian capitalism proceed at a rapid pace, lest the very bases of capitalist class rule in Russia disintegrate and/or the military - security apparat be forced to launch a coup as the only alternative to a complete collapse. It was this situation that appears to have led Gorbachev to go beyond the effort to "democratize" the Stalinist party and transform it into an instrument of Perestroika, in short, to abandon the policy of depending on the Nomenklatura to effect a restructuration of Russian capital. Instead, Gorbachev has apparently decided to outflank the recalcitrant Nomenklatura, and basing himself on the techno-managerial stratum and the intelligentsia, has embarked on a program to utilize non-party political organs such as the renovated Supreme Soviet (sic.) and republic, regional, local and city councils to reconsolidate the political bases of capitalist class rule in Russia. In effect, Gorbachev has embarked on a desperate gamble to bypass the party and its entrenched bureaucracy and forge a new political apparatus based on electoral mass mobilizations and on the unprecedented (since Stalin's day) power of the leader in the form of the newly created post of president. However, one vital element in the completion of such a project is still lacking: a political party or organization which can serve as the vehicle for a mass electoral mobilization within the framework of a presidential dictatorship. Without such a political organization, the formal power that Gorbachev has assumed under his new constitution will be of little use. Gorbachev's unwillingness to assume the presidential mantle by way of direct election at this time was an acknowledgement that in this respect the Gorbachevian project remains incomplete. It is precisely on this front that Gorbachev must act in the coming months.

The upcoming Congress of the Stalinist party may be the occasion of a split, with Gorbachev seeking to turn it into an electoral vehicle -- shorn of the conservative and Marxist (sic.) elements linked to the Nomenklatura -- through which he can try to mobilize the masses behind his economic program. Or Gorbachev may leave the Stalinist party apparatus to the

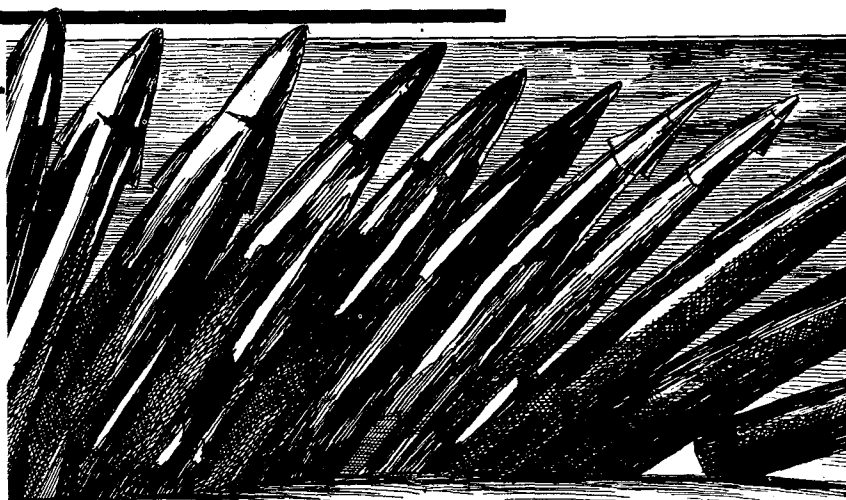
conservatives, give up the post of General Secretary, and forge a totally new political organization. In either case, Gorbachev's populist presidential dictatorship is intended to give him the *marge de manoeuvre* that he would lack even as party chief. This concentration of power, unprecedented since 1953, with the backing of the techno-managerial stratum and the intelligentsia, and the concomitant weakening of the Nomenklatura, may finally open the way to a serious effort to restructure the Russian economy.

Yet any such restructuring still faces the opposition of the Nomenklatura, and may be too late to avert an explosion of class struggle or the disintegration of the Russian capitalist entity at the behest of nationalist factions of the ruling class in the non-Russian republics (the situation in the Baltic states and in the Caucasus is extremely serious). If the Gorbachevian project fails to produce results and slow the

process of politico-economic collapse, the faction of the ruling class that has become decisive over the past three decades, the military - security apparatus, may abandon Gorbachev and take power in its own right. In fact, it already appears that Gorbachev rules at the sufferance of this faction of the Russian capitalist class. However, in the absence of any alternative to Gorbachev's program of Perestroika, or any alternative to Gorbachev's democratico-populist ideology, the military - security apparatus is constrained -- for the moment -- to back the new president. How long a moment that will be is one important question facing Marxists today. Its answer depends on the complex interaction of the unfolding of the economic crisis, the rapports de forces between the two imperialist blocs and the development of the class struggle.

MAC INTOSH

THE IMPERIALIST BALANCE OF POWER ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT



Four months ago in my text "The Upheaval In Central Europe", I argued that the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia marked a significant shift in the imperialist balance of power in Europe in favor of the American bloc. Since that time, events have not only confirmed that analysis, but have actually further eroded the position of Russian imperialism. The conditions originally imposed by Gorbachev to prevent a wholesale retreat of Russia from the Central European bastions occupied in the wake of World War Two -- continued membership of these countries in the Warsaw pact, continued participation of the Stalinist parties in the government, and the continued separation of the two Germanies -- have all been overturned or are in the process of being overturned.

In the case of East Germany, Gorbachev's hope of stabilizing an independent GDR after the fall of Honecker was quickly shattered: neither a renovated Stalinist party -- rebaptized the Party of Democratic Socialism

(sic.) -- nor a prospective "third way" around the intellectuals of New Forum could staunch the flow of East German workers to the West and the collapse of the economy. Russia had to accept the prospect of a united Germany, and desperately seek to delay the inevitable, while still insisting that a unified Germany must be neutral. The victory of the Kohlite Alliance for Germany in the elections opened the way to a speedy unification and to the almost certain prospect that a united Germany will be a member of NATO. As far as East Germany is concerned none of Gorbachev's conditions will be met! Indeed, at the last meeting of the Warsaw pact only Russia actually insisted that a united Germany be neutral, and Poland and Czechoslovakia (the only two members at that time with non-Stalinist governments) explicitly endorsed the membership of a unified Germany in NATO -- a position that will clearly be echoed by the new East German government.

With respect to Stalinist participation

in a coalition government, here too it seems that Gorbachev will have to accept defeat. In Poland, the Stalinists still retain a minority role in government, but only until the next parliamentary and presidential elections, when in all likelihood they will suffer electoral extinction. Meanwhile, the Solidarnosc government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, after its imposition of a Friedmanite economic program and support for the participation of a united Germany in NATO, is now moving to eliminate the Stalinists from their last bastions in the bureaucracy of the interior and defense ministries. In East Germany, the elections mean that in the negotiations for German reunification the two German states will have virtually identical governments, committed to NATO and the West, and in the case of the GDR with the Stalinists having been excluded. In Hungary, the elections produced a victory for the parties of the center-right, the Democratic Forum (nationalist and populist) and the Free Democrats (liberal, "Western"), with the Stalinists to be excluded from any role in the new government. In Czechoslovakia, the same outcome is almost certain in the upcoming elections. Moreover in each of these countries, the new, non-Stalinist, governments are carrying out a ruthless purge of Stalinist cadre from the ranks of the bureaucracy, even as they distinguish between those bureaucrats whose party cards were simply their entry ticket into the ruling class, and those (far fewer) who were really loyal to Moscow.

The membership of these countries in the Warsaw pact is a more complex issue, but it is necessary to recognize that even now their military participation in the Russian bloc is merely formal. The armies of Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia are already effectively outside the control of Russia, even as their governments remain -- for the moment -- formal members of the Warsaw pact. German reunification will mark the disappearance of the GDR, and with it a German presence in the Russian bloc. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the governments have already negotiated a timetable for the complete withdrawal of Russian troops. In Hungary it is quite probable that the new government will also take steps to formally withdraw from the Warsaw pact (that is the position of the the Free Democrats, for example). It is likely that Poland and perhaps even Czechoslovakia will choose to remain members of the Warsaw pact (and that Poland will even permit the stationing of Russian army units on its soil) as a defensive measure against the danger of a resurgent Germany. However, even this will be very different from the incorporation of the countries of Central Europe in a Russian dominated military pact that represents an offensive threat to its NATO rival; that situation, which has prevailed for more than forty years in Central Europe, has been effectively ended by the recent upheavals.

No mere account of the recent events in Central Europe can convey the real extent of the dramatic shift of the imperialist balance between the blocs in favor of the West. For

that, it will be necessary to show the role or function that the presence of the Russian army in Central Europe played both in guaranteeing the cohesion of the Russian bloc and in the overall strategy of Russian imperialism.

The presence of the Russian army in the countries of Central Europe has been the real, effective, guarantee of their loyalty to Moscow ever since World War Two. Given the difference in economic strength between the US and Russia in 1945, America would impose its hegemony over Western Europe through its overwhelming economic power, its capacity to reconstruct the devastated economies of Europe west of the Elbe (though the American military presence, at least at the outset, was a critical factor as well). Russia, herself devastated by the war, could only look on Central Europe as a region to loot and plunder. As a result, the US could count on the support of the bulk of the capitalist class in Western Europe for its project for a post-war world, while the Russians had to seek to eliminate the existing capitalist class in Central Europe, impose a Stalinist bureaucracy and prevent the development of nationalism (inevitably anti-Russian) that appeared even within this latter -- all through the use of Russian troops (or the constant threat thereof) to assure their control. While the US dominated its bloc through a network of economic and financial institutions (e.g. GATT, the World Bank, the IMF, etc.), Russian domination of its bloc has remained dependent on direct military control. The use of Russian troops in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the famous Brezhnev doctrine, the threat of Russian intervention in Poland in 1981, which temporarily reconciled Poland to the imposition of Martial Law, all attest to the necessary role that the Russian army has played in assuring the cohesion of the Russian bloc. Indeed, it is only now becoming absolutely clear to what degree the Stalinist regimes in Central Europe were in fact Quisling regimes, lacking virtually any ideological legitimation in the eyes of the masses, devoid of any real base even in the ruling class, and totally dependent on Russian tanks for their very existence. Once Gorbachev made the choice not to use the tanks to prop up these regimes, they promptly collapsed like a house of cards. And with them has gone the absolute Russian domination of this region enshrined at Yalta in 1945!

The effective withdrawal of the bulk of the Russian army towards its own frontiers now taking place is compelling a thorough -- even if only temporary -- revamping of the basic strategy of Russian imperialism as it has existed since 1945. In the inter-imperialist competition between the blocs on the European continent, in the military strategy prevailing in Moscow, Russia has always seen the only possibility of counteracting the economic superiority of the American bloc to lie in a rapid occupation of the industrial heartland of Western Europe in the opening weeks of a conventional war

between the superpowers. To achieve that goal the Russian army would have to break out of Central Europe (East Germany and Czechoslovakia) sweep across West Germany and into France and the low countries in the early stages of a conflict. Logistical support behind the rapidly changing frontline would be provided by non-Russian Warsaw pact troops, thereby freeing the Russian army for frontline action. That offensive strategy, the only one possible for the weaker bloc, has dominated thinking and planning in Moscow from Stalin to the present time. The American strategy, by contrast, has been defensive since 1945, continuing with the formation of NATO in 1949 (as befits the stronger bloc). The task of the NATO forces was to prevent a Russian breakout and occupation of Western Europe, holding the Russians in Germany until American reinforcements could arrive and stabilize the situation. Russia's strategy has therefore been predicated on the capacity to mass overwhelming military power as close as possible to Western Europe. Until now, the Russian army has been poised only a few hundred miles from the Ruhr. With the withdrawal of the bulk of the Russian army to its own frontiers, the Russian army (as an offensive force) will be nearly a thousand miles from Berlin! Instead of starting from forward positions in the heart of Germany, Russia would now first have to fight its way

across Central Europe, encountering the resistance of the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians who were once countered on to provide vital logistical support and protection for the lines of communication. In terms of an offensive war in Europe, the only one that Moscow has ever prepared for, the upheaval in Central Europe and demise of the Stalinist regimes there -- however necessary it was in terms of Russia's need to restructure its economy and thereby ultimately shore up its military position -- has significantly weakened Russian imperialism at the present historical conjuncture.

The inability of Russia to control the countries of Central Europe (as it has for more than forty years) as a result of the end of effective military occupation and the removal -- at least temporarily -- of any serious possibility of a Russian offensive that could speedily occupy Western Europe, consequent on the pullback of the Russian army, can only be seen as a serious reverse for Russian imperialism. A recognition and acknowledgement of this fact is today the indispensable starting point for a Marxist analysis of the international situation.

MAC INTOSH

March 28, 1990

CORRESPONDENCE

CONTINUED FROM P. 24

on their own class terrain (and so against the Sandinistas and all other bourgeois factions). By explicitly expressing the bourgeois viewpoint on the question of the 'reactionary-ness' of various bourgeois factions we: (1) only assist in the leftist mystification process and will in all likelihood be unable to lead any (or more than a very few) workers any closer to consciousness, and (2) more importantly, we open the door to further concessions to bourgeois ideology, which could begin to move from 'what we agree to initially say to workers' in our interventions to our theory and analyses.

I should add that although it was argued in our discussion that we must consider as elemental to Sandinista repression their mystification-then-mobilisation of workers and peasants to pay with their lives and blood for Sandinist state capitalism, I was not previously at all clear about having this viewpoint in my perspective on the 'national liberation' of Nicaragua - e.g. I would have thought: weren't 'the people' simply defending themselves against the attacks of Somoza's National Guard and later the contras? (Of course I should have been clear about the proper perspective on this issue after reading the ICC pamphlet *Nation or Class?*.) When this argument was presented to me it was probably seen that I was not fully clear about it. But as I thought about it, along

with all the other things I found myself forced to rethink, I realised that, of course, to the extent that the Sandinistas were mobilising workers, peasants and sub-proletarians for such combats, this was right. Whether one chooses to use the word 'repression' in such a case is unimportant; what is important, like the imperialist states in the world (and lesser) wars, these 'liberationist' factions use workers and peasants as cannon fodder for their state capitalist aims, making them directly responsible for those deaths and casualties.

NOTE: As a result of reading the excellent article 'Cuba is a capitalist hell: a closer look at some leftist lies' in *Internationalism* no. 36 I have also come to a better understanding of how revolutionaries should look at the 'liberationists' improvements in public health, education and social services: it's the same as the social democrats and Keynesians in the 'advanced' countries, at least since the 1930s - to have a healthier, better educated (educated at what?), social serviced, and hence a more productive population, who are then grateful and loyal to their rulers, to exploit. (As this year is the 10th anniversary of the Sandinistas' 'revolution', I would like to see and think it is certainly needed still, an article of the sort mentioned above on leftist lies about and the realities of the Nicaraguan working class under the Sandinistas in the revolutionary press.)

E

THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU



Making Sense of the Events in Eastern Europe

For anyone who is a regular reader of the revolutionary press, its coverage of events in Eastern Europe was a welcome bracer after all the hymns of praise to the triumph of "democracy" in the East that were broadcast in the bourgeois media. But at the same time, the deficiencies of the milieu were never more obvious: from our own inexcusable delay in getting our positions (developed in November) into general circulation, to the incoherence and lack of explanation in many publications, all the way to the veritable tail-spin suffered by one organization in particular.

The PCI (Le Proletaire) ran articles full of denunciations not only of bourgeois "democracy" but also of the capitalist class "both East and West" and its imperialist designs. It condemned the reactionary nationalisms of the East as much as the "anti-stalinism" of the Gorbachev reforms. It clearly saw the manoeuvres of the different factions of the capitalist class for what they were and did not try to dress them up in the borrowed clothes of a "proletarian revolt".

Reading Le Proletaire on the Eastern bloc today, one has an idea of the clarity that the bordigist current represented twenty or thirty years ago when it was one of the few authentic proletarian voices piercing the lies of the counter-revolution. But today, one is forced to add that their clarity is possible only because we are dealing with Europeans. Since 1917, it has been clear even to the bordigists, that bourgeois democratic movements and national movements are not "progressive" in Europe. But if we had been talking about a Third World country in the "geographical zone" where such movements are, supposedly, still "progressive", the PCI would have carted out the same concessions to bourgeois and nationalist movements that it

displayed in its positions on Algeria, Palestine and in relation to other "oppressed peoples".

Battaglia Comunista, tracing its origins to the Italian Left as well, also has a theory of "zones" where bourgeois democratic and national movements may be "necessary". Although its flirtation with the supporters of the Komala movement in Iran was more superficial than the commitments of the PCI (Le Proletaire), it seems to want to ascribe a positive value to what it deems "an authentic popular insurrection" in Rumania. For Battaglia, the movement lacked leadership, a true working-class political party; otherwise it could have become a real social revolution. If only the Party had been there, it would have changed this dross into gold like a true alchemist, regardless of the lack of autonomous organization by the workers or the manipulations of the ruling class.

Battaglia and the Communist Workers Organization (Workers Voice) are together in a regroupment within the IBRP (International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party) and yet their positions do not share the same emphasis. The CWO does not jump on the bandwagon of the Rumanian events. The CWO sees the events of recent months as the result of the world economic crisis and does not situate the massive demonstrations on a proletarian terrain. But at certain points the CWO suggests that the Russian bloc is finished and that new blocs will form in the world (but does not develop this line of reasoning); elsewhere, it suggests that the collapse of the stalinist regimes was part of a careful plan of the Kremlin. There is certainly nothing wrong with debate and differences in a proletarian organization. On the contrary, that is its life blood, the sign that it is a living organism of the working class, capable

of recognizing the need for greater understanding and clarity in our period. But this is only true if there is open debate, accessible to the workers who are interested and who undoubtedly share many of these ideas or assumptions. The CWO has been capable of open debate in the past and there is no reason to believe that this will not be the case now. But in recent years, the privatizations of the Thatcher government have pushed the CWO to question the entire basis of the state capitalist theory. We hope that events in Eastern Europe won't be interpreted by them as the beginning of the end of the theory of decadence: the end result of this germ of an idea that the blocs have disappeared.

The "Gauche Communiste Internationaliste (Communisme)" of also vaguely bordigist origins, now increasingly drawn away from this tradition, goes farther than the others in openly applauding the "proletarian" movement in Rumania. "Proletarians in Rumania have risen as a bloc against Ceaucescu and his clan of assassins." According to the GCI, although the popular movement has its limits, it is a proletarian movement. Communisme may be well-written but its lack of political insight is a glaring example of the crisis in the milieu. The Mouvement Communiste, an offshoot of Communisme, shares its political concessions on Rumania.

In Alarme, published by the Fomento Obrero Revolucionario, readers can find important denunciations of Walesa and Solidarnosc and positions on the events in Rumania. The FOR states that the proletariat in the East was "everywhere drowned in organizations that are alien and hostile to it (nationalist, state, religious, democratic organizations); nowhere could it fight or arm itself in its own interests." It is not entirely clear, however, what it means when it writes that "the workers rapidly gave over the direction (of the insurrection) to the 'specialists' in taking power for themselves", since the workers who participated in the demonstrations were not organized on a class terrain and could hardly have "turned over" a power they never had. These phrases may be isolated out of context and not express what the FOR really meant to say; the group denies any ambiguity. The fact remains that the most serious failing in the work of the FOR is the fact that they provide no coherent explanation of why the collapse of the stalinist regimes occurred. The FOR continues to deny the existence of a world economic crisis. One wonders, then, why all the stalinist regimes have gone under? For the FOR, apparently, the answer is the class struggle. They would deny that this interpretation tends to push them to overestimate the level of class struggle in the East or confuse class struggle with the political manipulations of the bourgeoisie. But it becomes very difficult to understand why all of a sudden, after suffering for so many years, people in the East pour into the streets and demand changes, or pour across the borders, or strike, if not because the

economic situation makes it impossible to continue as before. And more important, why were these changes encouraged, if not in some cases instigated by Gorbachev, if not because the economic collapse of the Eastern bloc is a reality due to the disastrous effects of the world crisis on these weaker economies. The entire revolutionary milieu had underestimated the effects of the crisis in the East, otherwise these events would not have come as such a surprise to all of us. But by continuing to deny the very existence of the crisis, the FOR limits itself to merely reacting to events rather than providing a coherent context.

The groups of the milieu know how to "fall on their feet" when events call, but what is missing in most cases is an analysis, a coherent framework in which to place these events and others that will surely come tomorrow.

In trying to provide such a coherent framework, the ICC has unfortunately gone full-scale off the deep-end.

The ICC : Marxism or Science Fiction?

Take almost a decade of denying reality (the ICC's theory of "the 80's, Years of Truth" when supposedly decisive class confrontations were to determine the course of history for the revolution and, of course, justify all feverish activism). Add a large dose of sclerosis (brought on by theoretical regression in the very foundation of the organization). Then, shake it up in the wake of the upheavals in Eastern Europe, and what do you get? The ICC ready to take a leap into the void.

What is this leap into the void? The ICC position begins by stating that the defeat of stalinism and the events in Eastern Europe mean not merely a defeat for the weaker Russian imperialism and a victory for the other bloc, but rather the definitive decomposition and death of Russia and Russian imperialism as a whole. Furthermore, they also consign the Western alliance to decomposition and death, thereby eliminating the danger of imperialist world war. At the same time, class consciousness is felt to be ebbing because of the effects of democratic mystifications. Class struggle can no longer restrain the decomposition of society in the major industrial centers. Drugs, corruption and crime have brought a new historic course: no longer war or revolution, but a course towards chaos and degeneration.

These points deserve to be examined one by one.

"From now on, the Eastern bloc no longer exists"... "The USSR plunges into chaos". (International Review 61)

The USSR is certainly suffering from the profound effects of the world economic crisis

in ways that we as revolutionaries have hitherto underestimated. The damage caused by the crisis shows itself in political instability, class struggle and ethnic unrest. There is no denying that Gorbachev himself will have to work overtime to hold onto his position. But it is a far cry from any realistic assessment of the difficulties of the USSR to jump off the deep end by saying the whole imperialist bloc has now ceased to exist.

How intriguing to conjecture about the end of an entire imperialist bloc without a war or even a shot fired. Either bloc would undoubtedly be overjoyed if the other were to disappear due to the economic effects of the crisis alone, without even having to fire a missile. Think how much time and effort could be saved! The weaker bloc would, of course, always be destroyed first by the crisis and the stronger bloc wouldn't have to dirty its hands. This idea that the capitalist class of an entire bloc commits suicide when the going gets tough used to be ridiculed by the ICC itself when it was still in its right mind.

In a war, the definitively defeated imperialist power is occupied and its military positions and potential destroyed. Is the ICC seriously contending that this has happened today? Despite serious setbacks, the Russian military machine and nuclear arsenal have not been either captured or neutralized. Yes, the difficulties for the Russian bloc are very great with the economic crisis, ethnic troubles and the loss of East Germany as well as perhaps Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but where, besides in their overheated imaginations and in some media hype heaven, has the Russian war machine been destroyed?

It was Germany's fate before two world wars to be the weaker imperialism and thus, Germany and its dreams of empire were cut down to size by rival imperialist powers. But with or without a "bloc" at a certain point in time, the weaker imperialism, far from committing suicide, has indeed often eventually been forced to be the aggressor, as in the case of Germany.

The ICC never offers the slightest bit of proof for its speculations. Ethnic difficulties, tanks in the street, deserters from the army, although debilitating in the extreme, never prevented the American bourgeoisie from maintaining its imperialist sway and do not mean that "the authorities have completely lost control of the situation" or that the imperialist power is dead. Would that it were so easy!

But the ICC goes further. According to them, NATO, too, is finished as is the Western alliance as a whole. "...while the declining cohesion and eventual disappearance of the western bloc hold a perspective of increasing difficulties for the world economy." (Int. Review 61)

This is certainly a strange state of af-

fairs. Usually, in any coherent marxist context, when one imperialist power suffers a setback, the other benefits. Not for the ICC; for them, both blocs are falling apart. The disintegration of imperialism as a whole used to be thought of as the consequence only of class struggle, of the revolutionary action of the proletariat. But today for the ICC, imperialist blocs have "imploded" like some giant anti-matter.

Aside from the invalid theoretical framework of such speculation, we are, again, unaware of any attempt to relate this to the real world. Where are their any signs of NATO falling apart? Tensions, yes, and conflicts within the western bloc exacerbated by the crisis, but this by no means adds up to a decomposition of the bloc except in the ICC's flights of fancy. Apparently, the ICC feels that the Western bloc will be falling apart because of trade wars between Japan and the US and Germany now that (in their minds) the Russian threat is over. They make two somewhat contradictory "predictions": one is that Germany will rise again, and the other that world war will be impossible (not because the proletariat is too combative for this to happen but because imperialist blocs are over.)

Forseeing an objection, the ICC hastens to say that this does not mean that imperialism, as such, is dead. Oh no. There will still be the imperialism of each little country, freed from the Russian and American "gendarmes", and thus, plenty of local wars and what they call the "Lebanonization" of Europe.

These kinds of "predictions" don't hold water. Imperialism in the 20th century is state capitalism, the war economy, the formation of blocs. When the ICC blithely states that "imperialism will continue" they are pretending that 18th and 19th century trade wars and rivalries can now take over from state capitalism. The theory of state capitalism is based on the existence of military blocs not local trade wars. The capitalist class of the major industrial areas is not going to settle its differences through the chaos of clan warfare typical of a backwater like Lebanon or Afghanistan. And the rule of state capitalism will not cease no matter how many horrible ethnic massacres we may be forced to witness in Eastern Europe. If the ICC persists in this kind of analysis, it will have to be logical and give up not only the theory of state capitalism but also the decadence of capitalism. And then, with the blocs gone, why not support national liberation struggles? Why can't these little imperialisms truly be free and no longer condemned to go from one bloc to the other? What the ICC has taught so well to others, it has now decided to forget.

But the new theory the ICC is so proud of as a sign of its "vitality" is not finished yet.

"The tendency towards a new shareout of the planet between two military blocs is countered and may even be definitively compromised by the increasingly profound and widespread decomposition of capitalist society....History's 'course' is expressed in a spreading putrifaction of the entire social body, whose various manifestations we have already analysed in the International Review: the drug scourge, generalized corruption in high places, the threat to the environment, the proliferation of so-called 'natural' or 'accidental' disasters, the development of criminality, despair and nihilism amongst young people." (I.R. 61, p 4-5)

Sex, drugs and rock and roll have finally been the death of western civilization! It sounds like the rantings of Jehovah's Witnesses or the Moral Majority. Corruption in high places? Was there a time when capitalism "played fair" or have we forgotten the massive corruption scandals of the 18th and 19th centuries? Was revolution easier for the proletariat when Victorian morality (supposedly) held sway? Only someone whose words become sacred writ as soon as they are uttered could present such pathetically embarrassing stuff as marxist analysis.

SEARCHING FOR THE "NEW"

The ICC sees in this outlandish scenario the proof that it is not a "dogmatic, ossified organization". It has been able to grasp the new! And what's more, it has produced all this in record time, hardly pausing to draw breath.

There are many new aspects of capitalism in our period that are waiting to be analyzed but the ICC has remained blind and deaf to them. The economic crisis of today has NOT followed along the lines of 1929 in producing massive unemployment affecting the majority of the working class. Yet the ICC has never seen fit to re-evaluate its simplistic notions on unemployment and the unemployed struggle. So far, capitalism in the major heartlands has confined permanent unemployment to a fraction of the class but this significant percentage, sometimes as much as a third, has been reduced to near total pauperization and marginalization. These unemployed and working poor are living side by side with an increasing lumpen population which is a special prey to drugs, criminality and disease. What is for us a CLASS issue is, for the ICC, a moral issue of "social putrifaction".

The ICC is still looking for the working class at Longwy and Denain; it has consistently refused to consider the recomposition of the working class in late decadence. (see IP 15). In fact, for the ICC there have been no changes in capitalism since 1914; our attempts to draw attention to the economic changes in capitalism by using the framework of the formal and real domination of capital

met with their curt denials. (see IP 13). The ICC does not link any changes to an economic analysis and so, it is no wonder that they end up with the non-marxist categories of "culture critique". This is not innovation; it is desperation.

For many years the ICC claimed, as we did, that stalinism was the bulwark of the Eastern regimes. When stalinism fell, it was certainly necessary to reconsider this notion. Could the Eastern bloc exist without stalinism and in what sense? (see this issue of IP). But the ICC doesn't seem to be able to analyze things; it just jumps from the frying pan into the fire. Running from the fall of stalinism, it falls into the end of all blocs. And as usual in the latter-day ICC, this 180 degree turn takes place without any open discussion. If we look at the history of the workers' movement, we see that events of such major importance as the ones that have just taken place in Eastern Europe have always been greeted with discussion and debate in genuinely proletarian organizations. But the ICC knows for a fact that what the workers need now are "precise directives" (about social decomposition?) and that debates among different positions are laughable ("IP has more positions than members"- ha, ha,). And so as one man, the army of the ICC rallies to this new theory...while feeling very hurt, not to say veritably outraged, when we ascribe their monolithism to stalinist practices within the organization.

Some neophytes may seem to feed off the ICC's new prophetic warnings about the future of western civilization and disillusionment with the proletariat whom they must now goad with jeremiads. But the true consequences of the ICC's "decomposition theory" are all negative.

- The possibility of world war has now been banished ... by the ICC but not by the major protagonists. The danger of this way of thinking is obvious. Although in the short-term inter-imperialist antagonisms may seem to decrease on the surface between the Russian and American blocs, below the surface, these tensions have now moved their theatre of operations to the heart of Europe, and this is otherwise more serious than ethnic rivalries in the Balkans.

- The tenets of the ICC's new decomposition theory are an implicit repudiation of the theory of decadence. With this new course, the ICC has intensified the effects of its theoretical and political degeneration.

- The way the ICC continues to maintain that it "was never wrong" about the idea of the 80's as the years of truth or, indeed, about any previous analysis in the last 10 years, gives once again a negative example of the bourgeois style of leadership via bluff and

monolithism. With this, it poisons not only the milieu today but the very credibility of revolutionary activity for future generations.

PERSPECTIVES

Those in the revolutionary milieu who are not merely fixated on short-term reality have seen that beyond the immediate shock of bourgeois democratic mystifications, recent upheavals can work as the old mole to undermine the capitalist world order. The crisis is creating the basis for a homogenisation of the living and working conditions of workers East and West; it is making it possible for workers East and West to pierce the veil of mystification with their own direct experience of bourgeois "democracy". It can ultimately create the groundwork for the internationalization of class struggle without which the revolution is impossible.

We have always said: "welcome to the crisis". Yet we thought this crisis would appear to us dressed in the garments of the past and thus be more easily recognizable. But what we are seeing today is part of the long-awaited crumbling of the system that the development of class consciousness must witness.

The revolutionary milieu will continue to agonize until the political crisis in its midst is directly addressed or until all the useless remnants of the past are washed away to make room for tomorrow.

JA



LEFTISM

As loyal as ever to capitalism in the east

(This article focuses on the positions of Trotskyists and Maoists in Belgium, who hold similar positions to their counterparts in other countries.)

To maintain its domination over the working class, the exploiting class, the bourgeoisie, needs violence. Overt repression when the workers demand change and refuse to kneel but also ideological violence to confuse them politically and impede the development of class consciousness in the working class.

This ideological poisoning goes on relentlessly, with all the advocates of capital taking their turn to praise, each in his own way, the glory of capitalist society. Priests, ministers, journalists, politicians, judges, union leaders, they all sing their tune in praise of liberty and democracy. The media campaigns become increasingly intense.

Still, all this media pressure, flooding the world with images, with information and counter information, with moralizing speeches and charity campaigns, also contains a powerful antidote against indoctrination, against massive campaigns such as those between the 2 world wars. Workers today have access to a mass of information which allows them to analyze events, albeit not without difficulties, as the efforts of revolutionary groups illustrate.

To complement its general campaigns, the bourgeoisie has other assets to sell its message to the workers: its leftists, who have developed a workerist rhetoric over the years, twisting experiences of the workers movement and the names of revolutionaries of the past to justify their own existence.

The leftists always try to become accepted by the workers as their expression or even their leaders. So now their propaganda tries to be even more radically democratic than the regular media.

How to distinguish friend from foe? That's a fundamental problem for the working class. The class nature of a political group is not determined by individual standards but by its political principles. The historical experience of the class shows there are 2 fundamental positions no proletarian group can reject without becoming a defender of the capitalist class: the recognition of the capitalist nature of the USSR (or, to be more precise, the capitalist nature of the relations of production

of all the so-called socialist countries); and the defense of internationalism, which means the rejection of all appeals to defend one capitalist country against another in war. It demands of revolutionaries that they spare no efforts to stop workers from killing each other for the sole benefit of the exploiters.

Today, these questions have once again become very timely. It's therefore not surprising that the bourgeoisie seeks to sow confusion and to reinforce the workers' hesitations with its campaigns about the defeat of "socialism" and the reawakening of nationalisms, presented as a victory of "democracy".

Marxism, communism, socialism, statification, nationalisation... what exactly are they talking about? The bourgeois press doesn't really know and its leftists are showing similar hesitations. Faced with the reality of the crisis of capitalist relations of production in the East, a reality which they have been hiding for years, they find it difficult to come up with a somewhat coherent analysis. But what kind of change does this left faction of capital see in the East? The trotskyists respond: "It's an anti-bureaucratic reform which confirms our predictions!" and the maoists imperturbably state: "It's the work of the CIA."

These maoists, defenders of the Tienan Men massacre, of Ceausescu and Honecker, are still short of arguments to explain their flip flop on the nature of Russia. Under Brezhnev, they called it "fascist imperialism" while under Gorbachev it suddenly became a "socialist country", despite Gorbachev's unambiguous defense of the need to intensify the exploitation of the workers. Clearly, this bourgeois current which openly defends the worst crimes of Stalin merely follows the zigzags of the Chinese diplomacy. Being totally alien to the marxist thinking, they can only wallow in the most vulgar sort of materialism and flatter the workers in search for some influence.

By presenting the countries in the East as socialist, by praising Stalin's repulsive work as a necessary step on the road to communism, these mao-stalinists make workers cringe at the very thought of communism and thus participate

in the indoctrination campaigns of the bourgeoisie against class struggle: "Why struggle if such regimes are the outcome?" Ridiculous as they are, these mao-stalinists have their use for capitalism.

The trotskyists on the other hand are smiling broadly. Mandel and his "4th International" gleefully recall their many years of opposition against stalinism and loudly proclaim that it's stalinism which has died, not socialism! If you want to understand the excitement of those who describe the events in the East as an historical rehabilitation of Trotsky - a man who was a true revolutionary before he identified himself with the State against the workers and became a critical supporter of radical bourgeois parties- it's necessary to see which mystifications this current defends today. Since the 30's, it has given its critical support to stalinist Russia, in the name of the "socialist accomplishments" in this "workers paradise" and

has called upon the workers to support one imperialism against another, breaking with proletarian internationalism. Reading "La Gauche", the paper of the "4th International" in Belgium, one is struck by the ambiguities in their analysis. For them, capitalism boils down to a number of formal, juridical traits. They do not see the relations of production as taking shape in the accumulation process but as the product of legal titles of ownership. According to them, society's economic infrastructure and its superstructure do not necessarily follow the same course. For them, the Russian revolution replaced capitalist relations of production with state ownership of the economy. Then came the bureaucrats. Against Lenin's advice and despite Trotsky's resistance they took hold of the command levers and these vampires have lived like parasites on the accomplishments of the socialist state ever since.

Mandel, a "marxist" university economist and the Pope of the "4th International", explains this position:

"We must give a global and coherent explanation of the stalinist phenomenon: it's the despotic dictatorship of a bureaucracy, a privileged social layer which has encroached upon the power of the working class and has installed a monopoly of political power to defend and extend its material privileges. That is the bankruptcy of stalinism, not of socialism." (La Gauche, 6/5/90.)

Despite its critique of stalinism's falsifications of history, trotskyists have to do the same to justify their own approach. At the first signs of exhaustion in the Russian revolution and with the advances of the counter-revolution in the '20's, left communists opposed the hesitations of the Communist International. Trotsky, meanwhile, defended a voluntarist policy of forced industrialization, aimed at laying the foundations for the expanded accumulation of capital. He participated in the physical liquidation of the workers' resistance in Kronstadt and elsewhere, thereby opening the door for stalinism. And he fought against the attempts of the communist left to regroup internationally, claiming that revolutionary had to continue to work within the party apparatus controlled by Stalin. Later, trotskyism came up with the utopian perspective of bringing down the bureaucracy in the East without touching the economic foundations because these are already socialist! This explains the 4th International's policy of support to "Soviet" Russia. In this way, trotskyism broke with internationalism and it would on several occasions call upon the working class to mobilize for the support of "the homeland of socialism". Their critique of stalinism is also the only explanation they give of the events in Eastern Europe. For Mandel,

"what is in crisis today in Eastern Europe is not socialism, which has never existed there. What is falling apart, is the "economy of command", closely linked to "the State of command", that is to say despotism, the dictatorship of the bureaucracy."

(La Gauche, 2/26/89)

Mandel uses a jargon which demonstrates nothing: what does this "economy of command" mean, what does he compare it to? But what's puzzling is his affirmation that socialism has never existed there, while he has always defended that the relations of production have changed in the USSR.

Trotskyism limits the events in the East to a political change: Stalinism was condemned because of the anti-democratic management of the bureaucrats. That's the fundamental explanation of the "4th International". Stalinism is cut down to a simple usurpation of power by a parasitical layer of bureaucrats. So recent events are described by the trotskyists as an anti-bureaucratic revolution developing on the base of the economic acquisitions of central planning. According to "La Gauche", what we are witnessing is

"the bankruptcy of the privileged bureaucracy which took over the State after the suppression of capitalism. The bureaucracy transformed this State into an increasingly oppressive instrument for the defense of its interests. [It's] the bankruptcy of the management of the planned economy by this parasitical layer which has made the satisfaction of social needs impossible, by replacing the citizen's democracy with the circulars of the fonctionaries. The anti-bureaucratic revolution has only just begun. What is taking place in Poland and Hungary is the decomposition of "the economy of Command" (of state-bureaucratic management) without leading to capitalism."

On the tragic events in Rumania, "La Gauche" writes:

"The events which have led to the fall of Ceausescu are the beginning of an anti-bureaucratic revolution in this country.[...] The tragedy of this revolution is that it lacks its own political leadership in the form of cadres, militants, programs and a strategic plan." (La Gauche, 1/9/90)

The trotskyist view of history is well summarized here. It would be enough to change the political leadership to rectify the degenerating course followed by the Nomenklatura. The trotskyists take no notice whatsoever of the counter-revolutionary role of the stalinist bureaucracy. Moreover, Mandel hastens to remind us what's at stake, for them, in the current situation: getting this bureaucracy to recognize his 4th International.

"The very hard criticisms which we address to the stalinists are in no way opposed to a

policy of a workers' united front which implies a debate and a permanent dialogue at the top as well as the grass-roots level. This has to take place in a climate characterized by a minimum of tolerance." (La Gauche, 6/5/90)

In this quote, trotskyism reveals its role: to give critical support to the anti-worker policy of the bourgeoisie in the Eastern bloc and to continue to falsify the real nature of the USSR and its satellites. The position of Mandel implicitly gives a progressive role to the bureaucracy and leads to the defense of nationalisations, that is, the tendency towards state capitalism in decadent capitalism.

So leftism appears to be utterly incapable of explaining the changes in the East with even a minimum of credibility. This isn't their function anyway. With their theory of the anti-bureaucratic revolution, the trotskyists are calling upon the workers to support, in the name of democracy, the bureaucratic cliques that have gained power. So, behind their exalted speeches about the bankruptcy of stalinism, they continue to serve us the same hodge-podge of support for the ongoing transformations in the East. Yesterday, they called for supporting the regimes in the East on the basis of the supposed changes in the relations of production (without being able to explain, however, the contradiction between this "changed economic reality" and the "despotism of a parasitical layer"). Today they reject their old "criticized allies" and discover the qualities of a faction of the bourgeoisie which, in democracy's name, tries to make state management more flexible and attract foreign capital. Mandel has no doubts about what they're doing:

"Is it the restauration of capitalism? No. All the economic experts agree that the private sector will recuperate at most 10% of the State's enterprises [in East Germany] in the foreseeable future: 2000 of 20 000. The majority of these companies are not profitable under the present price system nor would they be under a reformed system." (La Gauche, 12/26/89)

Since when is State management of unprofitable sectors something anti-capitalist? It's just another example of the theoretical contorsions of this anti-worker current which has sought to enlist the proletariat behind the defense of "the socialist homeland" and which will continue to do so now with its revamped slogan of support to the "anti-bureaucratic revolution".

F.D.

CORRESPONDENCE

Are some regimes less reactionary than others?

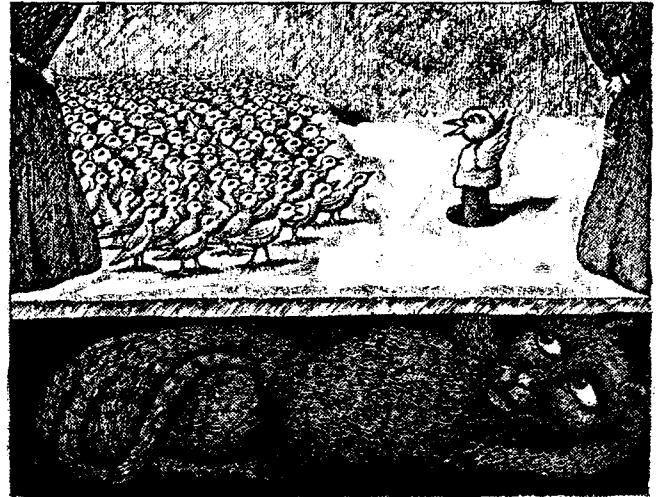
INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past year, the Seattle/Vancouver Discussion Group (SVDG) has been discussing the fundamental positions of revolutionary marxism, using as their point of departure the original ICC platform, which is the political basis of our Fraction and which was altered after our departure from that organisation (see IP9 and IP10).

The need to debate the platform in its entirety became clear after disagreements arose around the national question. All participants in the SVDG agreed that today, so-called national liberation struggles are conflicts between capitalist factions and that those third worldist regimes and movements calling themselves 'socialist' and 'marxist' (like the Sandinistas or the FMLN in El Salvador) are in fact fighting for state capitalism. Yet, some in the group defended the view that such regimes were "less reactionary" than the rightist regimes they replaced (such as Somoza's in Nicaragua). Under their rule, the workers would be less oppressed, receive a higher social wage (education, health, social assistance), have more freedom to organise, while poor peasants would gain from the land reforms such regimes try to introduce. Yet despite seeing all these benefits for the workers and the poor, these comrades rejected any form of support for these 'less reactionary' regimes and movements.

At the request of one of the SVDG participants, our Fraction wrote a contribution to this discussion, which was well received and helped the discussion move towards real clarification. Because the position described above is shared by many who sympathise with the revolutionary movement, we print here our contribution to the SVDG discussion, as well as a text in which one comrade of the SVDG describes the evolution of his views as a result of the discussion.

In the meantime, the SVDG has completed its discussion of the platform and is continuing to explore the main questions facing revolutionaries today, as well as distributing revolutionary press in the Northwest. Some in the SVDG published in 1989 a Class Struggle Bulletin which contains an article on the nurses' strike in British Columbia and one on the perspectives for class struggle



today. It can be obtained, free of charge, from PO Box 69804, Station K, Vancouver, BC V5K 4Y7, Canada.

LETTER FROM THE FRACTION

Dear comrades in Vancouver and Seattle,

We support the proposal to discuss the platform as a whole. Not only because this is the best way to survey the foundations on which revolutionary theory/praxis is based, and thus the best way to clarify issues, delineate agreements and disagreements, etc but also because it provides the coherence, the framework in which the national question, around which disagreements arise amongst you, can be fruitfully discussed.

As you go through this platform, you'll see very soon that the crucial concept in its coherence is 'decadence'; the realisation that, in the early 20th Century, the historical conditions for the struggle for socialism dramatically changed. Capitalism had exhausted its historically progressive function and could from then on only survive through the barbaric cycle of war and reconstruction. And through the development of state capitalism. Decadence forced the state to become the embodiment of the capitalist class, taking over the controls over the crisis-bound economy, organising society's militarisation, gobbling up the whole of civil society to prevent its contradictions exploding, including the structures

which had their origins in the working class's struggle to defend its interests under the conditions of ascendant capitalism.

We shall not duplicate the platform's efforts to show the implications of decadence on the crucial issues facing the class in its struggle, the unions, etc. It's up to you to examine these implications in the course of your discussion. The point we want to emphasise here is that the understanding that the capitalist system as a whole is in decadence and that therefore the working class revolution becomes both possible and necessary, means that there are no longer any 'progressive' factions in capitalism, or even 'less reactionary' factions, that in any sort of way deserve the support of the working class or can support its struggle.

It might be interesting to ask why marxists in the 19th Century with whom we identify differentiated between the 'left' and the 'right' factions of the bourgeoisie, or why they supported some national liberation struggles and rejected others. Their criterion certainly was not of a moralistic/humanistic nature. They didn't see one faction as more 'benevolent' or 'humane' than the others and therefore worthy of support. Their criterion in calling some bourgeois faction and some national liberation efforts 'progressive' was that they contributed to the development of capitalism's productive forces, against those factions that defended the vestiges of feudalism and which therefore helped to mature the conditions for proletarian revolution. If we agree on the analysis of decadence, we must accept that this argument is no longer applicable today. The global condition imposes on any capitalist faction the defence of its system of exploitation against its won contradictions, against the working class as its primary goal.

Lenin differentiated between the left and right of capitalism because he saw one as weaker than the other and therefore easier for the working class to overwhelm. He was mistaken even in his own time, but today it would be even more senseless to argue that left regimes are weaker than rightist ones or that 'democratic' regimes are somehow weaker than overt dictatorships.

We are not arguing that the differences between these countries and regimes are non-existent. Nor do we refuse to see the differences between moments within decadence (war, reconstruction, open crisis). We are not blind. One's living conditions are probably better if one lives in the US rather than in Cuba, or in Cuba rather than in Haiti. (It all depends for whom of course.) The degree of backwardness (development of the economy, historical factors, even the effect of certain policy choices over others: they all create differences which marxists must acknowledge. The question is what to conclude from them. Uneven development is a characteristic of capitalism which will only

become more visible when the entire system is sinking into barbarism. Does the working class have to make a choice between the different faces of barbarism as capitalist factions, especially the leftists, relentlessly ask us to do?

I think we implicitly swallow some of that leftist propaganda if we accept the notion that, as E thinks, there are 'meaningful' differences between (especially in the 'third world' countries) at least some leftist/liberation factions and the rightist/lackey factions. E suggests that under the former there is less oppression and repression, better education, health services, social assistance and distribution of land, improving the lives of poor peasants. All revolutionary groups, those in the 'third world' included, reject that position. And for good reason. It doesn't stand up to the facts. Indeed, the worst examples of capitalist barbarism, of mass murder and bloody oppression and repression can be found in leftist/liberal regimes. Do we have to be reminded of the millions who died under Stalin in Russia, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Mengistu in Ethiopia? Are the workers of Nicaragua any better off now that they are starving under 'socialism', and when they strike against their miserable conditions, they are massively dismissed, or when they meet, strikers are shot and killed by 'liberationist' police, as occurred in March last year? Even if we look at the fate of poor peasants, the record of leftist regimes is worse than the others, despite land reform (which, as a return to petty production can hardly be seen as 'progressive' by revolutionaries). Or, if we look at industrialisation (as Trotsky would) as a criterion, again the leftist regimes' record is worse (compare, for instance, North vs. South Korea). The few examples that could be used of temporary and limited (and therefore not very meaningful) 'progress' are all in the second category (Taiwan, South Korea). We can, of course, argue endlessly whether improvement in health services and literacy in Cuba compensate for the increase in concentration camp conditions which the working class suffers there. Or, whether the increased industrialisation and therefore consumption in South Korea offers some compensation for the harsh exploitation. And so on. From a revolutionary point of view these discussions are senseless. The choice of regime is done by the capitalist class; it does what corresponds best to its interests, the best way to protect its system of exploitation and repression, for which the means may differ depending on the circumstances. The interests of the working class (or the poor peasants, for that matter) is never a factor in this choice. The left and the right are two sides of the same coin and are often complementary. When the right is in power to impose austerity it's the task of the left to derail the class struggle, and arguments like those given by E are often used for that purpose. When the left is in power, its task historically has often been

to take on the working class with mystifications and repression, to prepare the terrain for the overt repression by a rightist regime (like the social democrats preceding the Nazis in Germany, or Allende before Pinochet in Chile). (Of course, there are plenty of examples to show that the left is just as good in bloody repression as the right.) Fascism and anti-fascism were both vital instruments for the capitalist class in the preparation of world war.

For capitalism, there will always be a multitude of arguments why the working class should support one faction against the other, so that it leaves the terrain of its own class struggle. It doesn't have to invent these arguments. They are based on facts. Like the decrease of unemployment from 20% to 0.3%, which Hitler could use to gain popularity with workers. It is only through their understanding of the global framework and its implications that revolutionaries can put these facts in perspective and unmask those who use them to state that some capitalist factions are less reactionary than others and thus worthy of some (critical or not) support from the workers.

E will remark that, although he does see some regimes as less reactionary than others, he "unconditionally opposes" all national liberation governments/struggles and does not "concede conditional support" to (bourgeois) democracy over fascism. Yet this position defies logic. If it is true that leftist regimes provide better living conditions than rightist for the workers, that they are less reactionary, that "communists and the proletariat have more room for struggle and organising under democracy" as he claims, on what grounds can we refuse some critical support, if only to get "more room for struggle and organising"? On what grounds can we reject frontism with the leftist/democratic factions of capital if, apparently, that is in the workers' best interests?

What we face here is a conflict of method. When looking at political positions or organisations, revolutionary marxists must use their global understanding of reality to analyse their class nature, determined by their function in society in all its implications. This is diametrically opposed to the bourgeois-moralistic approach which measures everything on a scale of good and bad. We must reject the very concept of a 'degree of reactionary-ism', which can be applied to any inter-capitalist conflict or choice; no two capitalists offer exactly the same, there will always be reasons to see gradations and differences.

E tries to use both contradictory methods, and he ends up with contradictory positions. They cannot co-exist, eventually one will expel the other. If you don't reject the second approach, class positions will go out the window. And not just the position on

national liberation. The standard of 'degree of reactionary-ism' can be applied to any intra-capitalist conflict. To inter-imperialist wars, for instance. If you accept it, you'll find it hard to defend internationalist positions and revolutionary defeatism. You'll find it hard to reject frontism, you'll find it hard to reject electoralism or even plain support to one candidate party over another. There will be plenty of arguments as to why one is less reactionary than the other. Or why the union leader or tendency is less reactionary than another, more corrupt one. And so on.

Revolutionaries cannot stop halfway, or even 4/5ths of the way, when breaking with bourgeois ideology, its methods and positions. Capitalism is not 60% or 95% decadent, it is everywhere, in all zones of the planet, in all its ideological forms totally devoted to the preservation of a thoroughly rotten exploitative system, totally opposed to the interests and the struggle of the working class. Even when it puts on appearances to the contrary. We cannot waver on this, despite the strong presence of capitalist ideology all around us, designing all sorts of 'progressive' 'less reactionary' 'more pro-workers' sheep's clothing for its wolves. (That even the revolutionary milieu suffers this influence can be seen in the wavering of Bataglia Comunista on the national question (see IP14), regressions in many groups on the union question and the ICC's concept of 'centrism' applied to capitalist organisations seen as somehow still a little proletarian too - see its change of the platform.) (.....)

For IP,

Sander

EXTRACT FROM E'S TEXT

1. My view was that leftist 'liberationists' of the sort represented by the Sandinistas were a capitalist faction to be opposed by the proletariat, but were also - for whatever reasons - interested in, and to some extent able to deliver certain improvements in living standards (for workers, peasants and sub-proletarians) and to lessen the outright, undisguised, repression wreaked by the right-wing or American-lackey factions (such as the Somozas). So I knew clearly that the Sandinistas were left-wing or radical state capitalists, not one step closer to proletarian rule than Somoza's dictatorship was, yet I also saw them as somehow 'not as bad' as, or a lesser capitalist evil than, Somoza.

2. Your letter was just the thing I needed; and it is - my attitude before receiving it was, and firmly remains - the kind of heal-

thy, rigorous and unblunted, yet fraternal criticism of my views I had looked forward to getting from the revolutionary milieu. The tough criticisms in this letter forced me to reformulate and to revise my views. In my response to your letter I admit that the judgement of the Sandinistas as being "less reactionary" than Somoza is a purely bourgeois judgement, not a marxist, revolutionary judgement, but one which we should be willing to acknowledge in order to get a hearing from ideologically mystified workers in Nicaragua (or elsewhere, especially the rest of Latin America). Thus your criticisms had forced me to become clearer that as revolutionary marxists we cannot consider the Sandinistas any less reactionary than any other capitalist faction, since our perspective - the perspective of the class conscious world-wide proletariat - is international communist revolution. The only reason I still felt any need to say that the Sandinistas were less reactionary, less repressive (perhaps less exploitative - however, I didn't know the facts about this) than was Somoza, was in order to be taken seriously by those Nicaraguan workers who considered themselves better off under the Sandinistas so that we could then begin an argument leading to the necessity for mass, direct action on the proletarian terrain, against the Sandinistas, in order to help lead to the socialism they might now be convinced the Sandinistas can lead them to. Thus, my focus of concern at this point was on intervention directed mainly at the Nicaraguan proletariat. So your letter had helped me to clarify what a genuine, rigorous marxist analysis of the nature of the Sandinistas and the tasks of Nicaraguan workers had to be.

3. This was my position as I went to our meeting. Once there the others helped me clarify my position by elaborating on the arguments put forward in your letter and conveying well the importance of maintaining the internationalist marxist perspective for the analysis of all political factions, regimes, movements and struggles. I was consequently led to question the validity of all my beliefs concerning the Sandinistas' being so much less 'reactionary', exploitative and repressive than Somoza had been. Many of them were very likely leftist lies and distortions. After all, it is the leftists who have so much at stake in proving that the Sandinistas are such a 'radically progressive' regime. This ties in with the rudimentary theory of the role of the left/'liberationist' factions in the 'third world' (taken in part from the ICC) I was led to sketch out in response to your letter, according to which the capitalist role for the left (in terms of preserving capitalist order or the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) is primarily to mystify the workers and poor peasants by pointing the rightists as (alone)

lackeys of American imperialism, while they (the left) faithfully represent the 'anti-imperialist', and perhaps even 'socialist', aspirations of the 'masses'. Of course, the leftists here, in the 'developed world' play an analogous role and so the left here must present the Sandinistas as the vanguard (since no-one believes any of the stalinists anymore) of 'third world progressiveness', 'the struggle against imperialism and for independence and social and economic justice', etc. and thereby (or at the same time) identify themselves ('in solidarity') with 'the people of Nicaragua and their representative' junta. It's all part of the role of the left at the level of 'international politics'. I had to admit that much of what I had been led to believe about the Sandinistas over the course of the last decade (through the 'propaganda wars' in the bourgeois media - which make those who identify, even 'critically', with the left or right 'at home' that much more fiercely, emotionally attached to those views) was whatever the most convincing defenders of the Sandinistas had claimed to be the truth. I realised and still think I must (and I already have to some extent) undertake a whole new revolutionary analysis and critique of the regimes in power in Nicaragua, Cuba and elsewhere, and those factions still struggling for power (such as in El Salvador).

On the question of whether we should capitulate to the bourgeois viewpoint as to the 'reactionary-ness' of the Sandinistas vs. Somoza, one participant in the discussion argued that again I was misled by certain leftist mystifications about the 'overwhelming' support of the Nicaraguan working class for the Sandinistas; while another argued that increasingly Nicaraguan workers will realise directly at work and under the role of the state that the Sandinistas are another faction of their real enemy even if many do not yet know this. These arguments, which have since led me to elaborate on them myself, took away the basis of my last reason for clinging to the position that we should agree with those Nicaraguan workers who believe that life under the Sandinistas isn't as bad as it was under Somoza. After all, we refuse to capitulate in any way to the bourgeois illusions of mystified workers here. Why should we give the workers in the 'third world' any less credit? We cannot consistently hold that Nicaraguan nationalism is any less reactionary than American or Canadian nationalism. Our intervention with respect to the Nicaraguan proletariat is only going to have a real impact on those workers who already, under the force of the developing class struggle, are breaking with any form of nationalism and beginning to struggle

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OUR POSITIONS

The external Fraction of the International Communist Current claims a continuity with the programmatic framework developed by the ICC before its degeneration. This programmatic framework is itself based on the successive historical contribution of the Communist League, of the I, II and III Internationals and of the Left Fractions which detached themselves from the latter, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists. After being de facto excluded from the ICC following the struggle that it waged against the political and organizational degeneration of that Current, the Fraction now continues its work of developing revolutionary consciousness outside the organizational framework of the ICC.

The Fraction defends the following basic principles, fundamental lessons of the class struggle :

Since World War I, capitalism has been a decadent social system which has nothing to offer the working class and humanity as a whole except cycles of crises, war and reconstruction. Its irreversible historical decay poses a single choice for humanity : either socialism or barbarism.

The working class is the only class able to carry out the communist revolution against capitalism.

The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat must lead to a general confrontation with the capitalist state. Its class violence is carried out in the mass action of revolutionary transformation. The practice of terror and terrorism, which expresses the blind violence of the state and of the desperate petty-bourgeoisie respectively, is alien to the proletariat.

In destroying the capitalist state, the working class must establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, as a transition to communist society. The form that this dictatorship will take is the international power of the Workers' Councils.

Communism or socialism means neither "self-management" nor "nationalization". It requires the conscious abolition by the proletariat of capitalist social relations and institutions such as wage-labor, commodity production, national frontiers, class divisions and the state apparatus, and is based on a unified world human community.

The so-called "socialist countries" (Russia, the Eastern bloc, China, Cuba, etc.) are a particular expression of the universal tendency to state capitalism, itself an expression of the decay of capitalism. There are no "socialist countries"; these are just so many capitalist bastions that the proletariat must destroy like any other capitalist state.

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based on working in the unions, whether to preserve or "transform" them, only serves to

subject the working class to the capitalist state and to divert it from its own necessary self-organization.

In decadent capitalism, parliaments and elections are nothing but sources of bourgeois mystification. Any participation in the electoral circus can only strengthen this mystification in the eyes of the workers.

The so-called "workers" parties, "Socialist" and "Communist", as well as their extreme left appendages, are the left face of the political apparatus of capital.

Today all factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. Any tactics calling for "Popular Fronts", "Anti-Fascist Fronts" or "United Fronts" between the proletariat and any faction of the bourgeoisie can only serve to derail the struggle of the proletariat and disarm it in the face of the class enemy.

So-called "national liberation struggles" are moments in the deadly struggle between imperialist powers large and small to gain control over the world market. The slogan of "support for people in struggle" amounts, in fact, to defending one imperialist power against another under nationalist or "socialist" verbiage.

The victory of the revolution requires the organization of revolutionaries into a party. The role of a party is neither to "organize the working class" nor to "take power in the name of the workers", but through its active intervention to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat.

ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

In the present period characterized by a general rise in the class struggle and at the same time by a weakness on the part of revolutionary organizations and the degeneration of the pole of regroupment represented by the ICC, the Fraction has as its task to conscientiously take on the two functions which are basic to revolutionary organizations:

1) The development of revolutionary theory on the basis of the historic acquisitions and experiences of the proletariat, so as to transcend the contradictions of the Communist Lefts and of the present revolutionary milieu, in particular on the questions of class consciousness, the role of the party and the conditions imposed by state capitalism.

2) Intervention in the class struggle on an international scale, so as to be a catalyst in the process which develops in workers' struggles towards consciousness, organization and the generalized revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The capacity to form a real class party in the future depends on the accomplishment of these tasks by the present revolutionary forces. This requires, on their part, the will to undertake a real clarification and open confrontation of communist positions by rejecting all monolithism and sectarianism.